

**Intercultural Competence in Fostering Teachers' Reflection in
Understanding Students' Diversity**

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, the development of multicultural competence, or synonymously called intercultural competence (IC), has been developed as a theoretical context in education areas. Teachers' inner reflection can do more in specific aspect of learning quality by understanding students' cultural differences through intercultural competence understanding. Adding self-reflection in the process of understanding interaction within different cultures and language will add more self-value in lessen the ethnocentricity. As teachers are having different culture experience, they would share to each other about the differences to another teacher, in which it allows the teachers to reflect from one another. This would subsequently, help teachers to run innerreflection to themselves, to dig more on their own values, that probably added after having cultural-changing experience

Keywords: Intercultural competence, teacher, student diversity

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the growth of international students has a significant growth. The number of international students enrolling higher education outside their home country reached over three million students in 2007. The number growth of such students having approximately doubled every 20 years since 1975 (OECD 2009). France, Germany, the UK and the USA receive nearly half of these foreign students, with most developing and transitional countries being significant net suppliers of students, and hence, being 'net importers' of higher education (Adnett, 2010). Having said that, the ability to understand the multicultural competence is greater than ever in education, both for students and teachers. In recent decades, the development of multicultural competence, or synonymously called intercultural competence (IC), has been developed as a theoretical context in education areas (e.g., Byram, 1997; Buttjes and Byram, 1991; Zarate, Levy and Karmsch, 2008).

Having said that, teachers' urgency in understanding different

cultures to deliver the best quality learning is one of the most highlighted aspects of teaching. Apart from enough numbers of teaching methods, self-reflection has been an approach to developing teachers' professional expertise. Both by doing inner reflection or outer reflection that is done with colleagues, peers or subordinates. Not only it helps teachers to understand students' engagement in the class and to ensure the learning quality that is given, but it also helps teachers to understand their inner self that leads to the understanding of their behaviours (Branson, 2005). The author sees that teachers' inner reflection can do more in specific aspect of learning quality by understanding students' cultural differences through intercultural competence understanding, especially to international students, as teachers' inner reflection proven in awakening conscious moral leadership (Baron, 2005) and that all types of social behaviour, pragmatic acts to understand IC are interpreted within the context of moral order (Kadar and Haugh, 2013).

This following essay will discuss the essential role of intercultural competence that will focus on teachers'

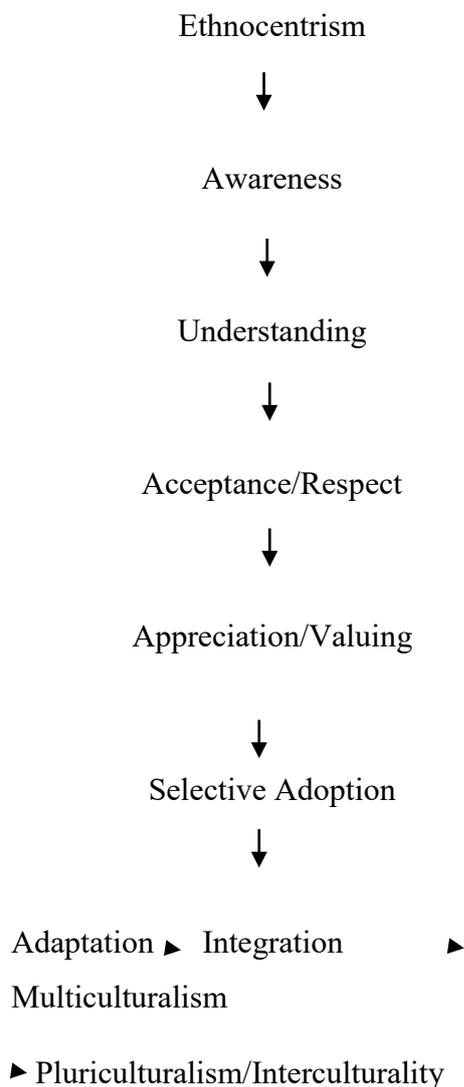
reflection around the issue of culture and self as the possible practical implementation. The author outlines IC theoretical approach for cultural reflection and practical considerations for potential teaching implementation in the education sector to develop social and cultural variation skills and cultural empathy of teachers to students that have cultural diversity.

DISCUSSION

The Role of Intercultural Competence: Mediation and Interpretation

Gross and Devin (2016) claims that several aspects of intercultural competence (IC) often cause harm than good as the needs of people to understand across cultures is important than ever. According to Byram (1997) IC is used to influence within foreign language education, by developing the ability of individual to have the knowledge about different cultures within specific meanings that coming through different language both oral practices or explained written.

As IC should help people to deal with cultural diversities phenomenon that sometimes unfairly hard to understand and to question themselves related to the events happened to move to higher level of engagement with others. Liddicoat and McConachy (2016) add that the understanding of using IC in practice is related to knowledge, assumptions and values based on particular assumptions about reality, in which the aspects of reality are judged depending on the level of conscious and unconscious understanding of evaluation criteria that eventually define a culture. In an outline form referring to Bennet (1993):



They, thus, define that there is a relation between awareness and mediation as elements of intercultural competence, which in a much previous discussion on intercultural mediation has focused on the way individuals use the knowledge of languages and cultures to mediate for others. As Liddicoat (2014) thinks that mediation

is mainly an interpretive activity engaged in by people for their understanding towards any interactions or conversations happened with others.

While some aspects of pragmatic phenomena may be universal, this does not mean that all individuals who speak a particular language would communicate or interpret collective behaviour act in the same way. It means that each language has types of interactional options to choose for reaching pragmatic actions, and the significance of these options is integrated to broadly shared cultural expectations. As Kadar and Haugh (2013) adds that all types of social behaviour, pragmatic acts are interpreted within the context of a moral order. Thus Liddicoat and McConachy (2016) define that it means pragmatic interpretation goes beyond just identifying the action of others, but also create judgements both in a conscious or unconscious way as to whether the act behaved in an appropriate way or not, in which necessarily a judgement of the individual as a social being.

Having said that; thus Coupland and Jaworski (2004) argue what seems

to be a problem in IC is that the cultural assumptions which come from oneself value that leads to judgements, tend to remain unconscious, which makes the development of intercultural mediation is highly relevant. Therefore, the development of metapragmatic awareness is an essential requirement for those who engage in IC. Liddicoat and McConachy (2016) explain that meta-pragmatic awareness is being understood in many ways. Some very much focus on linguistic aspects of language in what linguistic action is being performed (e.g., Mey, 1993; Verschueren, 2000). Other understandings of its awareness tend to relate with particular interactional contexts. McConachy (2013) adds that to understand the role of having the awareness of metapragmatic in intercultural mediation, it is important to acknowledge that for individuals who operate with more than one language, metapragmatic awareness is intercultural communication.

Liddicoat and McConachy (2016) claim that mediation then takes position as a process where individual makes conscious efforts to consider the cultural frames that shape interpretation

of pragmatic acts in each languages, to see how different languages and its consequences are used. Thus, meta-pragmatic awareness for intercultural mediation is characterised by valid awareness of culturally being contexted of pragmatic acts within and across cultures. Meditation has been positioned in relation to languages and cultures which necessitates comparison. While early attempts result in comparisons and value judgements of self and other, the ability to reflect and the ability to develop interpretation can be addressed as measurements of development (Liddicoat, 2006)

However, intercultural mediation cannot be simplistically assumed that it will always be successful. Liddicoat and McConachy (2016) mentioned that counteraction and discomfort encountered in the trial of meditation serve the important function of bringing to awareness to each individual's personal boundaries, which can be explored through further reflection. In this sense, while mediation is informed by an individual's starting point of meta-pragmatic awareness in any given interaction, the individual needs to engage in continual reflection in order

to have the ability to cultivate incoming cultural data thus increase meta-pragmatic awareness.

In sum, the findings of Liddicoat and McConachy's (2016) research has found that meditation in intercultural competence works only for linguistic character as the main aspect in any kind of communication. Thus, the cultural knowledge and interpretation need to be taken into the account of culture in the construction of meaning which relates to meta-pragmatic awareness that provides a resource for reflection on interpretation of cultural practices in intercultural competence in teaching and learning.

Intercultural Competence in the Education Process

In the area of education, foreign students are often a visible minority and make around 10% of student population on many university campuses, which means there are over million university students coming from outside their country (Elosua, 2014). Having said that, there is an urgent need to deal with "subjective culture" (Triandis, 1993,

cited in Elosua, 2014) that is providing students with the knowledge to develop an understanding of cultural values and communication styles to understand better the behaviour of others, interact in a more appropriate and effective way thus becomes interculturally competent (Elosua et al., 1994, cited in Elosua, 2014). It is necessary to develop intercultural competence intentionally, as it does not appear within a day experience. There is not a moment when a person appears expertise as interculturally competent, given that it is a permanent learning process, it is important for students to continuously engaged in a reflection activities towards their experience of their own learning (Deardorff, 2006)

Another study which examines intercultural competence in education is Moss and Marx (2011) that is based on a belief that teachers must learn to mind the gap between a culture which possibly exists between the students and themselves by having an experiment where the teachers are being put in international schools to influence teachers' intercultural development. This experience is counted as a catalyst for teachers to learn about a relationship

in the profound and meaningful understanding of people's similarities and differences (Romano and Cushner, 2007). Moss and Marx add that “*culturally responsive teachers must know themselves and their students as cultural beings and understand and accept the role culture plays in learning. To be culturally responsive, preservice teachers must first become culturally conscious and inter-culturally sensitive* (p.36)”. To do so, teacher educators must design cross-cultural placements carefully which address preservice teachers’ intercultural needs by providing them with opportunities to go up against their own ethnocentric views and to be engaged in critical cultural reflection.

The existing research on teacher education study abroad is highlighting the importance of cultural reflection during and after the experience to foster students’ growing cultural awareness. The study of Cushner and Mahon (2002) found that the greatest effects they feel are students’ sense of self efficacy and self-awareness. Apart on that, they also found the sense of global-mindedness and acceptance of cultural diversity.

Going forward, intercultural development is essentially related to the process of cultural reflection as research demonstrates the vital role of cultural reflection that is learned through cross-cultural experience, both in home country or abroad (e.g Spindler and Spindler, 1994; Howard, 2003). King (2000) identified that student needs someone else, teacher in this matter, to support reflective thinking. King explains that it is important for teacher to acknowledge student’s journey and set up an environment where the students can create a safe space to share what often confusing and difficult as teachers’ role is to guide student’s needs through respectful but challenging interaction that goes beyond student’s beliefs and teachers can encourage reflective thinking. Berger (2004) comments that teachers guide the students to approach the “growing edge” of their knowledge and awareness, to help build firm fundamental ground within creating an understanding towards anything, particularly in culture differences.

Self-Reflection in Creating Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The main idea of reflection is to give attention to one's experiences, behaviours and meanings are made and interpreted for them to inform future decision-making. Thus, to turn into culturally relevant, teachers need to be engaged in honesty, within critical reflection that challenges them to see how their personality influences their students in either positive or negative ways that includes an examination of how race, culture, and social class shape students' thinking, learning and various understandings of the world (Howard, 2003). Palmer (1998) adds that critical reflection requires deeper level of self-knowledge, as knowing inner self is as crucial to good teaching implementation as knowing the students and the taught subject. When teachers do not know themselves, they hardly know who their students are and subsequently, they cannot teach them well.

The understanding of knowing inner self deeply is developed by Branson on his 'The Self' framework, which subsequently he used to see the practical effect to school principals by

having questions to themselves regarding their past personal and professional experiences, self-values and beliefs to develop self-consciousness that creates leadership based on morality (Branson, 2007). The aspects of the Self affecting how one understands and interacts with the reality and not just unconfined to their own views of understanding. Through this way, one can consciously monitor oneself inner influences thus able to act freely in achieving the best moral outcome. Branson claimed that the structured self-reflection process can nurtured moral consciousness within oneself. Which subsequently, it completes the process of interpretation in making sense of culture and language differences, as As Kadar and Haugh (2013) have mentioned previously, that all types of social behaviour, pragmatic acts are interpreted within the context of a moral order

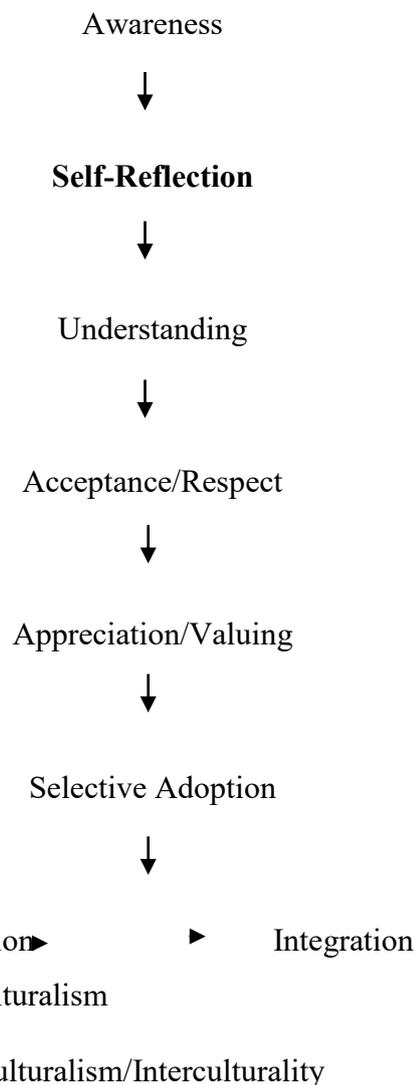
ANALYTICAL DISCUSSION

IC leads to unconscious judgments over culture, which then it has mediation to lessen the judgement that exists. As Liddicoat and

McConachy (2016) state that mediation helps individual to have a process where individual makes conscious efforts to consider the cultural frames that shape interpretation of each languages in practical way, to see how different languages and its consequences are used. Thus, awareness of identifying symbolic or non-verbal interaction for intercultural mediation is characterised by valid awareness of culturally contexted of pragmatic acts within and across cultures. However, referring to the findings of Liddicoat and McConachy's (2016) that their research has found the usage of that meditation in intercultural competence works only for linguistic character as the main aspect in any kind of communication.

The author then, comes up with proposing model of self-reflection as the development of mediation in educational area from Bennet's (1993) outline of IC, which then self-reflection can help teacher to be cultural mediator by using Branson's concept of 'The Self'.

Ethnocentrism



Why adding self-reflection process, is due to what seems to be a problem in IC is that cultural assumptions that leads to judgements came from someone's value that does not acknowledged by that person consciously, thus the judgment itself tend to remain unconscious (Coupland and Jaworski, 2004). Having said that, the author thinks that combining structured self-reflection that is

proposed by Branson is highly relevant to the development of meditation. Thus, self-reflection can provide construction of self-concept which relates to the understanding and awareness of interaction between different cultures and languages that leads to cultural practice in intercultural competence in teaching and learning for teacher facilitates and understanding better in communication as well as action between people in different culture. The aspects within Branson's 'the self' concept will affect one on how to understand and interacts with the reality and not just based on their own views of understanding.

In practical example, there is a research on teachers' experience teaching international students that is conducted by Salmona, et al (2015). The aim of the research is to enable teachers who are coming from the United States to local schools in an Australian community to develop new educational situation such as discovering on how to develop social and cultural variation skills and cultural empathy to students that has cultural diversity. Salmona et al. (2015) explains that what important for future teachers

is the development of greater cultural competence.

The finding of the research was the difficulties that the teachers from The United States experienced due to the lack of understanding in the new context and not yet having the cultural skills to adjust to new culture or having the confidence to find out about it. The other finding is that teachers found it difficult to accurately defining behaviours in the culturally different context. Thus, it reflects the lack in cultural empathy as they expressed self-conscious perceptions about how they were perceived and accepted by the people of the local culture and anxiety about meeting the expectations of locals.

However, A most positive finding for teacher education is that after a few weeks of struggling to interpret local behaviours, they began to empathise with others the encountered experiencing an unfamiliar situation. As in one of the informant comment in the research was talking about assumption that help increase empathy, that the teacher said, "*I think it's reminded me to remember that not everyone knows or*

has experience with the same things that I do. Don't just assume that they will know what you are talking about or what is customary in a situation" (p.47)

As teachers are having different culture experience, they would share to each other about the differences to another teacher, in which it allows the teachers to reflect from one another. This would subsequently, help teachers to run innerreflection to themselves, to dig more on their own values, that probably added after having cultural-changing experience. As Lawrence (2001, cited in Carol and Ryan, 2005) comments that academics are still teaching to the ideal form of teaching, the traditional approach of telling the students about something, instead of having a value-added in delivering the knowledge which gives valuable support in teaching process.

In essence, Liddicoat and McConachy (2016) would support that based on certain assumptions, and people build knowledge, interpretation, assumption and values to judge about the aspect of reality are depending on a range of consciously and unconsciously evaluation criteria of understanding.

Subsequently, when selfreflection can increase the range of consciousness, effective communication upon cultural differences can be a neutral tool for teachers to do teaching activities.

CONCLUSION

Adding self-reflection in the process of understanding interaction within different cultures and language will add more self-value in lessen the ethnocentricity. as Brunner and Guzman (1989) claims that the process allows students, teachers and facilitator to have action-oriented knowledge about culture reality, thus can help in clarifying and articulating the norms and value within the new culture context to reach general agreement about the next action in the future. In sum, developing cultural competency skills for teachers is fundamental for teaching process, to grow out of traditional teaching method, through developing intercultural competencies based on self-reflection approach. The process will then go beyond the understanding of linguistic, racial or ethnic difference, this will enhance the way teachers think, teach and learn.

Self-reflection would then help international students or teachers when they draw on culture, they could pick up an interpretation to construct their social action that is based on intersubjective that their diverse social group would agree. It will also shape the critical awareness towards culture, effective communication and tolerance between different background of home-nations. If the basic understanding has become a familiar concept throughout the teachers, eventually it is also beneficial for teachers helping the international students to have cultural transition and make the students feel comfortable during the adaptation phase.

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